

Stretch of beach at Cape Henlopen State Park closed to safeguard nesting piping plovers

LEWES (May 21, 2013) – The first piping plover nest of the season at Gordons Pond Beach in Cape Henlopen State Park has been discovered, with the parents-to-be defending their territory, DNREC Wildlife Biologist Matthew Bailey announced on Monday afternoon. The nest was found late last week, and when last observed, contained three eggs.

To minimize disturbances to the tiny endangered shorebirds, a half-mile stretch of beach between the Observation Towers and the Herring Point crossover was closed to the public today with signs, twine and PVC stakes to mark the area.

“Closing off plover nesting areas is an established protocol every year at Cape Henlopen, and this closing is in the typical area that beachgoers are accustomed to,” said Bailey, who serves as coordinator of the Division of Fish and Wildlife’s Piping Plover Protection Program. “The area will remain closed until the last of our plover chicks are fledged, usually in late August.”

Meanwhile, on the Point at Cape Henlopen, a total of five nesting pairs of piping plovers have been seen. One nest has failed, but four others have parents incubating eggs, including a female with bands on her legs.

“We don’t want to disturb the pair at the beginning of their nesting cycle, but we are confident that we will have good opportunity to further observe this female, get a full reading of the band combination and then report it to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which tracks endangered species,” Bailey

said. The band information will tell who did the banding and hopefully provide access to some of her background, he added.

In other beachnesting bird news, three pairs of American oystercatchers have set up nesting territories on the Point, and a pair has been seen making nest scrapes at Gordons Pond. Large numbers of least terns also are congregating on the shores of Gordons Pond but have not yet started to defend nesting territory.

For more information on piping plovers and volunteer opportunities, please contact Matt Bailey, Division of Fish and Wildlife, at 302-382-4151 or email matthew.bailey@delaware.gov.

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